

Fort Missoula, Laundry Building
Fort Missoula
Lewis and Clark County
Montana

HABS No. MT-20

HABS
MONT,
32- MISS,
3 -

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN DESCRIPTIVE AND HISTORICAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FORT MISSOULA LAUNDRY BUILDING

HABS No. MT-20

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MONT
32-MISS,
3-

Location: Fort Missoula, Lewis and Clark County, Montana.

Present Owner: United States Government.

Present Use: Reserve Officers Club

Significance: The Laundry Building is one of three remaining structures dating from the early days of the establishment of Fort Missoula.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Summer of 1877, making this the oldest remaining building at Fort Missoula. The other two early buildings are the Powder Magazine (HABS No. MT-13) and the N.C.O. Living Quarters (MT-14).
2. Original plans and construction: An early photograph indicates that at one time there were four entrances and four windows, supporting the belief that the building was originally divided into four units. Today the innermost doors are replaced by windows.
3. Alterations and additions: The building was rehabilitated in the 1920s, when the building became a recreation hall. During the work, an 1873 model Infantry Springfield rifle, .45-70 caliber, with 50 rounds of ammunition, was found in perfect working condition under the floor boards. The interior has been repeatedly remodeled over the years.

B. Historical Context:

In February, 1877, Congress authorized the establishment of Fort Missoula on the banks of the Bitterroot River. The Secretary of War ordered construction in May, 1877. The first troops, consisting of thirty soldiers under the direction of Captain C. C. Rawn of the 7th Infantry, arrived in June of that year. Work had hardly begun when Chief Joseph and his Nez Perce band came into the area in their flight to avoid being confined on a reservation.

The soldiers at the Fort tried to stop the Indians in Lolo Canyon, but were bypassed. Later they joined other troops in the field, and under the command of Col. John Gibbon pursued Chief Joseph and finally engaged him in what is known today as the Big Hole Battle -- the last big Indian battle in Montana. Captain Rawn was the only commander of Fort Missoula to engage in action against the Indians.

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After the battle, the Fort Missoula troops returned and continued construction on the fort. In September, 1877, General Sherman visited the fort and made plans to enlarge it to battalion strength. In November, after a march of some 600 miles from Corinne, Utah, companies of the 3rd Infantry arrived to assist in construction and to bolster the troops stationed there.

Records indicate that Lt. James Ross, stationed at Fort Missoula, conceived the idea that the Army should have regular bicycle troops, similar to the Cavalry. He received permission in 1896, and led a squad of troops on an 800-mile trip through Yellowstone Park. The next year he again directed a bicycle trip, this a 1,900-mile demonstration "march" to St. Louis, Missouri. The group was known as the "25th Infantry Bicycle Corps," and consisted of twenty-three black soldiers and Lt. Ross. The men carried full field equipment, and although plagued by rain and mud most of the way, they completed the journey in forty days. The trip was a success, but the coming of the automobile prevented the expansion of the Bicycle Corps.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: A one-story log building representative of the early fort construction.,
2. Condition of fabric: Only the outer log shell remains of the original building. Some of the logs extending below grade and those immediately above are rotting badly. The remainder of the building has been fairly well maintained.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The one-story building measures approximately 70' x 16', with two wings extending eastward, each measuring approximately 24' x 15'.
2. Foundations: Not visible, but presumed to be stone.
3. Wall construction: Logs, 10" to 12" in diameter, saddlenotched.
4. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There is one entrance on the west facade facing the parade grounds, near the north end of the building, which is in its original position. A similar entrance on the south end has had a small wooden entrance porch built onto it.

b. Windows: Two-over-two-light double-hung wood sash.

5. Roof: Gable roof with wood shakes.

C. Description of Interior:

Little remains today of the original floor plan. The doors and windows and the log ends visible on the exterior support the assumption that the building was divided into four units.

The interior has been refinished numerous times, covering all the original finish. The main portion of the building is one large hall today.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography:

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